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ABSTRACT

Brinkmanship behaviors are challenges to authority expressed in such a mannner that expected negative sanctions are typically avoided. They are usually extemporaneous, involve satire or sarcasm, and take place in front of an audience. This study investigated 43 principals' and 137 teachers' perceptions of teacher brinkmanship behaviors and sought to determine whether these perceptions are influenced by the perceiver's personality traits. The results suggest that the perceptions are not substantially influenced by the role or the personality of the perceiver. The teacher brinkmanship behaviors apparently arise as a function of the behaviors and attitudes of the "brinking" teacher's principal and are likely to be school-specific. Teachers and principals have almost identical attitudes toward brinkmanship behaviors. (Authors/FG)

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PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER BRINKMANSHIP BEHAVIORS

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ABSTRACT

Brinkmanship behaviors are challenges to authority expressed in such a manner that expected negative sanctions are typically avoided. This study investigated both principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher brinkmanship behaviors, and sought to determine whether these perceptions are influenced by the personality characteristics of the perceiver. The results suggest that the perceptions are not substantially influenced by the role or the personality of the perceiver. The behaviors apparently arise primarily as a function of the behaviors and attitudes of the "brinking" teacher's principal.

Theory concerning the nature of relationships between school administrators and teachers is limited. One reason why contemporary administrative theories "are still in the infancy stage"[1] is that educational phenomena are extremely complicated; thus, it is difficult to formulate theories which offer even a minimally comprehensive explanation of a highly interrelated set of numerous events. The complexity of the educational environment also makes it difficult to test empirically theoretical propositions so that they can be verified and so that subsequent propositions, once they have been formulated, can then be extrapolated and tested.

An understanding of individuals' personalities and attitude differences and the impact that these differences create in the school atmosphere is essential to the formulation of administrative theory. Attempts to understand administrators' behaviors and attitudes must take into account the unique situations in which each administrator functions. For example, administrators' perceptions of teacher behaviors may vary from situation to situation,[2] so generalizable conclusions about these perceptions can only be achieved by investigating perceptions in numerous situations. Attention should also

be given to the more stable and idiosyncratic characteristics of administrators.[3] For example, an administrator's personality, although changeable, is relatively stable and doubtless influences perceptions of teacher behaviors. Although personality variables alone generally have limited explanatory power, personality can have important mediating influences.[4]

It is important to understand which factors influence the behaviors of school professionals because the relationships among professionals are changing so dramatically.[5] Teachers seem more apt to challenge the authority of the principal. The expression of dissatisfaction often may lead to open confrontation or heated discussion.[6] Goffman[7] states that another mode of expression of dissatisfaction is role distance behavior. The teacher who demonstrates role distance behavior may not threaten the principal, but may not fully accept the existing work situation. Licata and Willower[8] have termed some such behaviors, "brinkmanship behaviors." Brinkmanship behaviors involve "attempts to challenge authority while avoiding the negative sanctions that would normally result from the challenge. Brinkmanship behaviors usually are extemporaneous, typically involve satire, sarcasm, or subtle disdain, and ordinarily take place in front of an audience."[9]

Brinkmanship behaviors have been classified into three categories by Licata and Willower.[10] The categories have been placed along a compliance continuum ranging from obedience to disobedience. "Subversive obedience" is rule obeying behavior in which someone follows the letter but not the spirit of a rule, or the person complies in an exaggerated way in order to use the organization's rules to its own disadvantage. Subversive-obedient teachers are quick to point out that they did not react to the disturbance in the lunch room because they were told to monitor the hall.[11] "Tightroping" is neither rule obeying nor rule disobeying behavior; it is behavior which exploits rule vagueness as a means to avoid organizational sanctions. Teachers who make satirical comments to the principal concerning procedures and practices that the principal has instigated display this behavior. "Boundary testing" is rule disobeying behavior which is disguised in some way so that organizational sanctions are avoided. "The teacher who bypasses the principal and confers with the superintendent about a certain problem is boundary testing. In this case the teacher is hoping that what he has to say will preclude any negative sanctions that the teacher would otherwise receive."[12]

This study investigated both administrators' and teachers' perceptions of teacher brinkmanship behaviors. Specifically, the questions addressed in the study were:

1. What are the factors underlying perceptions of teacher brinkmanship behaviors?
2. Are personality traits related to attitudes toward brinkmanship behaviors?
3. How similar are principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher brinkmanship behaviors?

Method

The subjects in the study were 43 principals and 137 teachers from 43 schools in the Jefferson Parish Public School System, a system serving suburban New Orleans. Principals from 50 schools were invited to participate, and following their agreement, 3 teachers from each school were selected. Participants were contacted in person individually and responses were collected anonymously. Of the 200 people invited to participate, 7 principals and 13 teachers did not respond, presumably because of the time required to complete the study's instruments. Participants were asked to complete the Vocational Preference Inventory (VPI)[13] and the Brinkmanship Survey.[14]

The VPI consists of 160 occupational titles which subjects indicate they like or dislike. The instrument yields a broad range of information about each subject's interpersonal relations, interests, values, self-concept, coping behavior, and identifications. Six of the instrument's eleven scales can be interpreted as vocational interest scales: realistic, intellectual, social, conventional, enterprising, and artistic. The remaining five scales are more clearly personality scales: self-control, masculinity, status, acquiescence, and infrequency.[15]

According to Scott[16] "a disguised measure of attitudes is one in which the task presented to the subject conveys one meaning to him, while the experimenter's interpretation of his response is based on a different meaning system." It was most important to this study to use a disguise to elicit responses which manifest personality without at the same time altering the manifestation. The VPI accomplishes this by producing personality descriptions through vocational interest stimulus items. Thus the measure is non-reactive.

The Brinkmanship Survey consists of six scenarios, two per brinkmanship category, portraying various teacher behaviors.[17] A seventh referent, "of all the teachers I have ever had, the one best teacher," was also employed to

provide a basis for comparing the perceptions of brinkmanship behaviors with an ideal standard. This standard has been employed in several previous studies.[18] Thirteen adjectives were used to describe the teacher in each of the seven scenarios. Subjects marked through an agree-disagree continuum to indicate how accurately they felt each scale described each scenario.[19] The 13 semantic differential scales were selected from among those successfully used several times in the past when attempting to characterize perceptions of teachers.[20]

Results

The first question posed in the study asked what factors underlie perceptions of teacher brinkmanship behaviors. This question was addressed by factor analyzing the 180 subjects' ratings of the seven scenarios. This analysis can involve several matrices of association,[21] including most notably either a pooled correlation matrix or a "total" correlation matrix. Both these matrices are presented in Table 1. Since the factors extracted from the two matrices were quite similar, the orthogonal factors extracted from the more conventional total correlation matrix were employed in the analysis. These factors are presented in Table 2.

Insert Tables 1 & 2 about here.

The second question posed in the study asked whether individuals' personality traits are related to attitudes toward teacher brinkmanship behaviors. This question was addressed by conducting a canonical correlation analysis.[22] The canonical correlation between norm-standard-scores on the VPI and each individual's mean factor score on the three factors was not statistically significant ($Rc = .27$, $\chi^2 = 27.3$, $\underline{df} = 33$, $\underline{p} > .05$).

The third question posed in the study asked how similar are principals' and teachers' attitudes toward teacher brinkmanship behaviors. This question was addressed by computing factor scores for all 180 subjects on each of the factors and each of the seven scenarios. These scores can be compared at several levels of analysis. Table 3 presents the means and their confidence intervals ($\alpha = .05$) for each scenario on each factor. The table also presents the average rating on each factor of each <u>type</u> of brinkmanship behavior. For example, "Caring-Subversive" involves the mean of each person's average ratings on the factor "caring" of the two scenarios portraying "subversive-obedience" behaviors. Finally, the table presents the means of each person's average rating of all six brinkmanship scenarios on the three factors.

<u>Insert Table 3 about here.</u>

Discussion

The three questions posed in the study provide some noteworthy insights into the dynamics of perceptions of brinkmanship behaviors. The Table 2 results indicate, for example, that a factor involving the intellectual characteristics of teachers did not underlie the subjects' perceptions of the seven scenarios. This result stands in sharp contrast to results in previous studies in which such a factor has consistently emerged.[23] Thus the result indicates that teacher brinkmanship behaviors are perceived differently than are teachers in general. Professionals make judgments about the warmth, rigor, and directedness of brinking teachers, but do not consider teacher intellect when evaluating brinkmanship behavior. Professionals apparently assume that brinkmanship behaviors may be performed by teachers independent of the teachers' intellectual abilities.

The finding that the personality variables were not significantly related to attitudes toward the brinkmanship behaviors is somewhat surprising. Since an individual's own experiences do tend to create core patterns of social behavior and beliefs concerning the nature of man and society,[24] it might be expected that attitudes toward brinkmanship would reflect personality. However, some theory suggests that personality variables alone have

limited explanatory power, although personality variables can have important mediating influences. In any case, when interpreted in light of previous research,[25] the result is important because it indicates that perceptions of brinkmanship behaviors are determined more by school-specific situation than by personality. As Stapleton and Croft[26] found, "acts of teacher brinkmanship will arise most often from situations which reflect what the teacher considers to be the principal's poor judgment or distorted values." This result is important because it suggests that administrators can minimize the frequency of brinkmanship behaviors by behaving in a manner which considers teacher perceptions and values. Of course, in some cases this may be easier said than done, since teachers even within the same school may have mutually exclusive hopes and aspirations.

Finally, the Table 3 results indicate that teachers and principals have virtually identical attitudes toward any given brinkmanship behavior. Of course, there were systematic variations in the subjects' perceptions of different brinkmanship behaviors. For example, the subversive-obedience and the boundary-testing scenarios were both perceived as being less caring than the two tight-roping scenarios. This finding is noteworthy because it suggests that, independent of role, professionals make

fairly refined judgments of the profession-related behaviors of colleagues. As Stapleton, Thompson, Frankiewicz and Croft[27] note, "this pattern should be heartening to persons who believe that educators are professionals only if they apply ethical standards in judging colleagues' behaviors."

Notes

[1]S.J. Knezevich, Administration of Public Education, 3d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 12.

[2]P. Hersey and K.H. Blanchard, Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1977).

[3]W. Hoy and C. Miskel, Educational Administration (New York: Random House, 1978); R.L. Katz, "Skills of an Effective Administrator," Harvard Business Review 52 (September-October 1974), pp. 90-102.

[4]H.J. Eysenck, The Measurement of Personality (Baltimore: University Park Press, 1976).

[5]S.F. Schwab, "One Man's Opinion," School Management 17 (August/September 1973), p. 7, p. 11.

[6]R.G. Corwin, "Professional Persons in Public Organizations," in Organizations and Human Behavior: Focus on Schools, ed. F.D. Carver and T.J. Sergiovani (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969).

[7]E. Goffman, Encounters (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961).

[8]J. Licata and D. Willower, The Consequences of Student Brinkmanship for the School Organization (Arlington, VA: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 136 437, 1975).

[9]J.C. Stapleton, B. Thompson, R.G. Frankiewicz, and J.C. Croft, "Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Behaviors," Education 100 (Spring 1980), p. 286.

[10]Licata and Willower, "Student Brinkmanship."

[11]J.C. Stapleton, Teacher Brinkmanship (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Houston, 1978; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, No. 79-1,214, 1978).

[12]Ibid., p. 7.

[13]J. Holland, Manual for the Vocational Preference Inventory (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists, 1978).

[14]Stapleton, Teacher Brinkmanship.

[15]J. Johnston, "Review of the VPI," in Seventh Mental Measurements Yearbook, ed. O.K. Buros (Highland Park, NJ: Gryphon, 1972), pp. 157-158.

[16]W.A. Scott, "Attitude Measurement," in Handbook of Social Psychology, vol. 2, ed. G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1968).

[17]Stapleton, Teacher Brinkmanship.

[18]cf. B. Thompson and A.H. Miller, "Dissonance Theory and Education Students' Attitudes Toward Teachers," Journal of Experimental Education 47 (Fall 1978), pp. 55-59.

[19]B. Thompson, "Factor Stability as a Function of Item Variance," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southwest Educational Research Association, Dallas, February 1981.

[20]B. Thompson, "The Instructional Strategy Decisions of Teachers," Education 101 (Winter 1980), pp. 150-157.

[21]R.G. Frankiewicz and B. Thompson, A Comparison of Strategies for Measuring Teacher Brinkmanship Behaviors (Arlington, VA: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 171 753), paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, 1979; B. Thompson and J.C. Stapleton, "A Method for Validating Semantic Differential Referents," Journal of Experimental Education 48 (Winter 1979/80), pp. 110-113.

[22]B. Thompson, "Canonical Correlation: Recent Extensions for Modelling Educational Processes," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, April 1980.

[23]R. Brown, Teaching Style Preference as a Function of Learner Intellective and Interpersonal Dispositions (doctoral dissertation, University of Houston, 1978; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, No. 77-1,499); idem, The Relationships among Student Evaluation of Teaching, Student Achievement and Student Perception of Teacher Effectiveness (Arlington, VA: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 133 314); idem, "Effects of Perceived Teacher-Learner Style Congruency on Teacher Evaluation," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, April 1978; idem, "Perceptions of Teaching/Learning Style: The Mediating Process in Student Evaluation of Instruction," CEDR Quarterly 12 (Winter 1979), pp. 16-18; A.H. Miller, B. Thompson and R.G. Frankiewicz, Attitudes of Teacher Education Students Toward Teachers

(Arlington, VA: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 104 887), paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., April 1975; Thompson, "Instructional Strategy Decisions," pp. 150-157; Thompson and Miller, "Dissonance Theory," pp. 55-59.

[24]H.P. Knowles and B.O. Saxberg, Personality and Leadership Behavior (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1971).

[25]cf. Stapleton, Teacher Brinkmanship.

[26]J.C. Stapleton and J.C. Croft, The Relationship Between Teacher Brinkmanship and Teacher Job Satisfaction (Arlington, VA: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 171 655), paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1979, p. 18.

[27]Stapleton et al., "Teachers' Perceptions," p. 291.

Table 1

Scale Correlations

	C	W	H	Sc	I	A	Ex	R	P	Ea	U	D	Si
Caring (C)	--	50	57	52	48	36	24	17	28	07	-22	10	-12
Warm (W)	64	--	53	40	44	30	10	08	26	30	-11	22	00
Humane (H)	72	68	--	52	58	40	21	13	32	17	-17	18	-11
Scholarly (Sc)	67	58	68	--	58	47	27	26	42	07	-15	13	-14
Intelligent (I)	64	59	70	71	--	50	29	26	38	08	-20	11	-18
Analytical (A)	53	42	54	58	62	--	35	32	37	06	-11	06	-12
Exacting (Ex)	38	20	32	38	43	48	--	44	37	-10	05	-03	00
Rigorous (R)	28	15	22	33	35	41	52	--	41	-08	-04	-03	00
Profound (P)	40	35	43	50	48	46	46	47	--	-02	-02	09	-06
Easy (Ea)	-02	22	09	01	-01	-03	-20	-15	-09	--	19	40	31
Undirected (U)	-37	-26	-32	-30	-35	-25	-18	-13	-14	22	--	09	29
Docile (D)	13	28	23	18	15	08	-03	-03	10	41	06	--	18
Simple (Si)	-24	-10	-21	-25	-30	-23	-13	-09	-15	34	35	16	--

Note. Decimals omitted. Above diagonal entries represent "pooled" matrix; below diagonal entires represent "total" matrix. Scales were actually randomly ordered on the instrument.

Table 2

Varimax-rotated Pattern Coefficients

	Caring	Rigorous	Tame	h^2
Caring[a]	.77	.27	-.06	.67
Warm[a]	.76	.12	.22	.64
Humane[a]	.83	.23	.07	.75
Scholarly[b]	.73	.38	-.01	.70
Intelligent[b]	.74	.40	-.06	.71
Analytical[b]	.52	.51	-.06	.53
Exacting[c]	.20	.68	-.14	.53
Rigorous[c]	.10	.71	-.08	.52
Profound[c]	.35	.59	.00	.46
Easy[d]	.11	-.16	.72	.56
Undirected[d]	-.42	-.04	.38	.32
Docile[d]	.25	-.02	.48	.30
Simple[d]	-.31	-.03	.52	.37

[a]Expected to be correlated with a factor called "Caring."

[b]Expected to be correlated with a factor called "Intelligent."

[c]Expected to be correlated with a factor called "Rigorous."

[d]Expected to be correlated with a factor called "Tame."

Table 3

Means and Confidence Intervals

	Teachers	Principals	Total
Caring	.01 (-.05, .08)	-.04 (-.14, .05)	.00 (-.06, .06)
Rigorous	-.02 (-.10, .06)	.07 (-.07, .20)	.00 (-.07, .07)
Tame	.02 (-.06, .10)	-.06 (-.17, .05)	.00 (-.06, .06)
Subversive-obedience			
Caring	-.42 (-.52, -.31)	-.50 (-.68, -.33)	-.44 (-.52, -.35)
Rigorous	-.09 (-.20, .01)	.09 (-.09, .28)	-.05 (-.14, .04)
Tame	.14 (.02, .25)	.02 (-.14, .18)	.11 (.02, .20)
Tight-roping			
Caring	.18 (.08, .29)	.08 (-.08, .25)	.16 (.07, .25)
Rigorous	.08 (-.02, .18)	.08 (-.11, .27)	.08 (-.01, .17)
Tame	-.11 (-.21, -.02)	-.19 (-.36, -.02)	-.13 (-.22, -.05)
Boundary-testing			
Caring	-.39 (-.49, -.30)	-.48 (-.60, -.35)	-.41 (-.49, -.33)
Rigorous	-.20 (-.31, -.10)	-.20 (-.38, -.01)	-.20 (-.29, -.11)
Tame	.03 (-.07, .13)	-.01 (-.17, .15)	.02 (-.06, .10)
Ideal Base-line			
Scenario 7			
Caring	1.35 (1.26, 1.44)	1.48 (1.38, 1.57)	1.38 (1.31, 1.45)
Rigorous	.29 (.15, .42)	.53 (.33, .73)	.34 (.23, .46)
Tame	.04 (-.12, .19)	-.08 (-.37, .21)	.01 (-.13, .14)
Subversive-obedience			
Scenario 3			
Caring	-.25 (-.37, -.13)	-.36 (-.57, -.14)	-.28 (-.38, -.17)
Rigorous	.18 (.04, .32)	.35 (.10, .60)	.22 (.10, .34)
Tame	.04 (-.10, .18)	-.10 (-.35, .15)	.00 (-.12, .12)
Scenario 4			
Caring	-.58 (-.70, -.46)	-.65 (-.86, -.44)	-.60 (-.70, -.49)
Rigorous	-.37 (-.50, -.24)	-.17 (-.37, .04)	-.32 (-.43, -.21)
Tame	.24 (.10, .37)	.15 (-.06, .37)	.22 (.10, .33)
Tight-roping			
Scenario 1			
Caring	.29 (.16, .42)	.09 (-.13, .32)	.24 (.13, .36)
Rigorous	.09 (-.04, .23)	.13 (-.06, .32)	.10 (-.01, .21)
Tame	-.14 (-.28, .00)	-.15 (-.33, .02)	-.14 (-.25, -.03)
Scenario 5			
Caring	.08 (-.06, .22)	.08 (-.15, .31)	.08 (-.04, .20)
Rigorous	.06 (-.06, .19)	.03 (-.22, .27)	.06 (-.05, .17)
Tame	-.09 (-.21, .03)	-.23 (-.44, -.02)	-.12 (-.22, -.02)
Boundary-testing			
Scenario 2			
Caring	-.38 (-.50, -.25)	-.53 (-.70, -.35)	-.41 (-.52, -.31)
Rigorous	.32 (.18, .46)	.37 (.15, .59)	.33 (.21, .45)
Tame	-.44 (-.54, -.33)	-.42 (-.58, -.26)	-.43 (-.52, -.35)
Scenario 6			
Caring	-.41 (-.52, -.30)	-.43 (-.56, -.29)	-.41 (-.51, -.32)
Rigorous	-.73 (-.85, -.60)	-.76 (-1.00, -.53)	-.74 (-.85, -.63)
Tame	.49 (.34, .65)	.40 (.13, .68)	.47 (.34, .61)